

# Healing the Earth

## Black and Native Women, Two Spirit, and Gender Expansive Folks in the Climate Justice Movement

*Review the case study and reflect on the follow-up discussion questions*

### This case illustrates:

Practitioners who hold understanding of racial justice and healing strategies opting to pursue a goal of climate justice together. The power of deep listening, safe conversation and sharing each other's cultural practices such as dance, singing and ritual. The benefits of seeing one another more deeply.

#### **Key topics considerations:**

Repair, healing, collective effort, environmental justice, ritual, ceremony, cultural connections, deep listening, and bridging racial differences.

#### **Setting:**

A group of Native and Black activists from across the country are coming together to address climate change. But before this larger environmental crisis could be addressed, The Wind & The Warrior partnered with the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy to launch a Sacred Waters Pilgrimage down the Mississippi River. The purpose of the Sacred Waters Pilgrimage was to cultivate and heal relationships between Black and Native culture-bearers and advocacy leaders working to address the climate crisis, and between humans and Mother Earth. These activists acknowledge the importance of building trust and community with each other before starting a lifelong fight for climate justice.



Members of The Wind & The Warrior collective, from left to right: Ife Afriye Kilimanjaro, Nana Fofie Amina Bashir, Nana Korantema Pierce Williams, Karma Mayet. Photo courtesy of the collective.

## BREAKING

The first breaking dynamic is due to the lack of reconciliation among Black and Native communities for their ancestors' and their own complicity in injustices. Their members have for generations been born into a society in which false competition has been normalized, and have been pitted against each other under settler colonialism and structural racism. Black folks played a significant role in battles against Native folks and Native folks captured enslaved Black folks. The second breaking dynamic being addressed in this work is the relationship that humans carry with Mother Earth. Extractive capitalism, overconsumption and the monetizing of natural resources have harmed our planet and human health, economic security and relationships.

## BRIDGING

The Wind & The Warrior led their bridging work through a Sacred Waters Pilgrimage that developed and strengthened relationships through dialogues, ceremony and ritual with Black and Native women, Two Spirit folks, and gender expansive people. The Sacred Waters Pilgrimage was a six-month journey which consisted of seven ritual stops along the Mississippi River. At each stop, The Wind & The Warrior coordinated with local groups of people who identified as Black and/or Native to join in open dialogues, ceremony and ritual. The participants were committed to learning from each other and bridged across cultural and racial differences. The pilgrimage was steeped in tradition and the ways of the elders of both communities.

## BELONGING

While one journey did not heal everything, it created a path towards relationship building and forgiving. The rituals and ceremonies created a structure and way of communicating, a way to connect with each other, shared experiences, shared language and to acknowledge similarities. Throughout their journey, the participants dispelled myths and stereotypes, and grew with one another. This allowed them to engage in more intentional conversation. A new 'we' resulted from the group interaction that permitted differences to be respected. At the same time, the participants began to see their futures intertwined as folks who can stand together in fights against oppression

# Questions for Discussion:

We want you to keep your thoughts to the points or facts illustrated in this story. For the questions in your life or your examples, please speak from the “I” experience.

Question	Educational Goal
1. Where do you see breaking in the story?	Be able to identify a breaking dynamic.
2. Why did the folks involved want to address the breaking dynamic?	Be able to identify the negative impacts of breaking, what happens when we don't bridge.
3. Why is it important for Black and Native folks to bridge or come together?	Be able to understand the importance of a bigger 'we.'
4. What policies and practices are the reason for othering?	Be able to identify policies and practices that manifest as intergroup othering.
5. In this particular case, what opportunities were opened by bridging? a. What were the reactions of the folks involved?	Be able to identify the impact that bridging can have.
6. What questions or critiques do you still have about breaking, bridging and belonging?	Be able to understand the frameworks enough to offer questions and critiques.
7. Where do you see or experience breaking in your own community, organization, school, or work setting? Can you describe the negative impact that these have?	Be able to apply the breaking framework in their own life experience.
8. Do you engage in bridging in your work? If so, how?  9. If you don't already bridge, how might you apply what you learned today?	Be able to apply the bridging framework.
10. What world do you see when we instead decide to bridge?	Be able to understand that smaller 'we' leads to harm. Be able to imagine a world where we focus on the bigger 'we.'